1608/S469

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON NATIONAL PROSPERITY.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE WEST CHURCH, *ABERDEEN*,

MARCH 10th, 1796.

THE DAY APPOINTED FOR THE

GENERAL FAST.

BY

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ABERDEEN:

PRINTED FOR A. BROWN, BOOKSELLER; AND SOLD BY MESSRS G. G. AND J. ROBINSON, LONDON.

1796.

1608/5469.

PSALM XXXIII. 12.

BLESSED IS THE NATION WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD.

THE moſt ſuperficial obſervation of nature, and the ſimpleſt dictates of reaſon, are ſufficient to diſcover a ſelf-exiſtent Creator and Governor of the univerſe. From this fundamental truth, another has naturally followed, and been generally admitted with equal facility; that, without the protection and favour of God, no ſolid and durable ſatisfaction can be enjoyed. Nor has this opinion been confined to the caſe of individuals. For, as no reaſon can be aſſigned why men, in their particular capacity, ſhould be the objects of divine providence, which will not be equally applicable to political communities, the happineſs of both muſt be acknowledged to be equally dependent on the divine favour.— This truth is alſo generally admitted.

Theſe conſiderations ſhould naturally lead us to expect, in thoſe eſpecially who are enlightened by divine revelation, the moſt conſtant impreſſion of the Deity's ſuperintendence, and a no leſs conſtant endeavour to render it conducive to their happineſs, by a conduct conformable to his will.— This juſt expectation is, nevertheleſs, ſtrangely contradicted by experience. For, even among thoſe, who not only admit, but would exert the moſt flaming zeal to maintain, the doctrine of a conſtant and particular providence, how commonly do we obſerve ſuch a conduct as can only be reconciled with the ſuppoſition of this doctrine being uncertain, or even evidently falſe! The facility, with which they aſſent to it, owing to the clearneſs of its evidence, leaves their attention, in ſome meaſure, diſengaged, and excites not that meditation on the ſubject, which would perhaps be produced, were a greater exertion of mind neceſſary to comprehend it. Paſſion, or intereſt obſcure, or obliterate a truth which they clearly perceive in their cool moments of reflection. Thus, mankind exhibit the aſtoniſhing paradox of acknowledging the abſolute dependence of their intereſts, whether as individuals, or as nations, on the favour of the

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the Deity, and of acting, at the ſame time, as if theſe were totally unconnected.

In this manner, the important doctrine of a particular providence, conſidered ſolely in the light of a ſpeculative truth, loſes great part of its force, as a motive to virtue.— In order, therefore, to preſerve its juſt influence, we muſt enter more into particulars, and conſider, in detail, the connection ſubſiſting between the preſent diſpenſations of God, and the conduct of men. This, as I ſhall, in the ſequel, have occaſion fully to ſhew, is particularly manifeſt in the influence which religion and virtue always have on national felicity. By contemplating the effects of theſe principles on political ſociety, we ſhall behold the Deity exerciſing his moral government in the cleareſt and moſt conſpicuous manner; we ſhall ſee conduct and retribution cloſely linked together; we ſhall diſcover thoſe direct, preſent, ſenſible advantages attending on virtue, by which the generality of mankind are ſo much affected; we ſhall plainly diſcern God himſelf *increaſing the nations, and deſtroying them; enlarging the nations, and ſtraitening them again.* Thus, ſhall we endeavour to fix on our minds, not a ſuperficial and tranſitory, but ſuch a deep and laſting im-

impreſſion of this great truth, as will have, I truſt, that effectual influence on our lives, which it is the deſign of this day's ſolemnity to produce.

In the text, the *Bleſſedneſs*, or happineſs of a nation, is declared to be the conſequence of its making *the Lord its God*. It is, therefore, neceſſary to underſtand the full meaning and import of this condition, before we can completely perceive the nature and extent of the felicity which depends on it. Hence, in treating this ſubject, I ſhall,

I, Conſider what is implied in the expreſſion, *the Lord's being the God of any nation*;

II, Review the principal reſpects in which this circumſtance, properly ſtated and explained, has a tendency to produce a nation's happineſs; And,

Laſtly, conclude with a ſuitable improvement.

I. The foregoing part of this pſalm is wholly employed in giving a conciſe, but, at the ſame time, comprehenſive deſcription of the nature and attributes of the ſupreme being. It begins with an exhortation to rejoice in his government, and to offer, to him, the moſt fervent adoration, and moſt grateful praiſe. But, leſt it ſhould ſeem

to

to impel us to a blind and undiſcerning devotion, it proceeds to point out that juſt ground for piety, which the divine character affords.—— His truth and righteouſneſs are diſplayed; his goodneſs is commemorated, and the whole earth appealed to, as its monument. His wiſdom and power are then expreſſed in the moſt forcible figures. "The heavens are made by his word; "the hoſt of them by the word of his mouth— "the deeps are gathered, by him, in a heap— "the waters laid up in ſtore-houſes— He ſpake, "and it was done—he commanded, and it ſtood "faſt." Theſe attributes are, then, declared not ſimply to exiſt in him, or to have been exerted, on ſome particular occaſion, but to be uninterruptedly exerciſed in the conduct of Providence, and to remain ſo unto all generations. Then follows our text: *Bleſſed is the nation whoſe God is the Lord:* where the ſupreme being is repreſented under two diſtinct characters, both plainly founded on the foregoing deſcription.— He is the *Lord*, as Creator, Preſerver, and Governor of the world, and, as ſuch, ought alſo to be *God* alone—that is, the object of religious worſhip and adoration.

The moſt obvious and loweſt ſenſe, then, we can affix to the expreſſions of *a nation's making the Lord*

Lord its God, is, that it acknowledges the great Creator of heaven and of earth as the only object of religious fear and ſervice, and ſuffers no fictitious deities to uſurp the honour which is due to him alone. In this ſenſe, the Pſalmiſt ſeems to have had, in his eye, the Jewiſh people, whoſe peculiar felicity it was to know and adore the only true God, while the reſt of the world was ſunk in ſuperſtition and idolatry, and *changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like to corruptible man, and to four-footed beaſts, and to creeping things.* *

But the ſenſe of theſe expreſſions, founded on the preceding deduction, not only excludes every idea of dividing, among different objects, our religious regard, but alſo neceſſarily ſuppoſes a juſt conception of the nature of that being towards whom it is exerciſed, and reprobates every unbecoming repreſentation of him. For, it is plain we can never worſhip and ſerve a being, of whom we are either entirely ignorant, or in the knowledge of whoſe attributes we are very deficient. It is the *Lord*, not a mere phantom of imagination, the object of ſilly admiration, or of childiſh terror, who is the *God* of the nation which is bleſſed. That nation is ſuppoſed to be enlightened

* Rom. i. 23.

ened with a juſt knowledge of his nature and perfections, of the relation in which his intelligent creatures ſtand to him, and of his intentions with regard to their preſent conduct, and their future deſtination, and, in conſequence of this knowledge, to preſent to him, ſuch a ſervice as is worthy of them to offer, and of the Lord, the almighty Lord, to accept. Its religion muſt not conſiſt in external ceremonies and ſuperſtitious obſervances, calculated only to pleaſe an empty vanity, or to appeaſe a capricious wrath. It muſt be led to pleaſe God, by imitating him, to ſecure his favour by obeying his eternal rules of rectitude, and to teſtify affection to him, not only by the obſervance of ſuch poſitive inſtitutions as he has appointed, but alſo by the habitual devotion of a virtuous life. As every branch of righteouſneſs is equally confirmed by his ſanction, and the maintenance of it equally his concern, it muſt be the predominant ſtudy of ſuch a people to practiſe every point of human duty, and to avoid a prevailing propenſity to any ſpecies of vice. The nation, therefore, that makes *the Lord its God*, muſt take his law for the grand rule of conduct, be devoted to his will, ſubmſſiive to his providence, grateful for his mercies and favours, and diſtinguiſhed, in a word, by a national character of piety and virtue.

This

—This, at leaſt, is the full import of the expreſſion, tho' I am ſenſible that mankind nowhere exhibit, nor ever have exhibited, the true original of the picture. But, as it is the buſineſs of Religion to ſhew men, not only what they are, but alſo what they ought to be, ſo, it was mine to carry out her meaning to all that extent which it can reaſonably admit. This was alſo neceſſary for fixing that perfect ſtandard, or rather medium of national felicity, which the text holds up to us, in the circumſtance now under conſideration.—That it is really ſuch, will now fully appear, while we review the principal reſpects, in which the national character, I have deſcribed as implied in *a nation's making the Lord its God*, has an influence on national felicity.

II. As, in eſtimating the happineſs of individuals, regard muſt be had to their capacities of enjoyment, and to their means of gratifying theſe, ſo, in eſtimating the happineſs of nations, the grand ſources of national felicity, and the moſt effectual means of ſecuring them, muſt be conſidered, and kept cloſely in view. Now, the principal ſources of a nation's happineſs may be reduced to theſe three—firſt, its internal order and tranquility, and the cultivation of thoſe arts

which

which miniſter to the convenience, the ſatisfaction, and the ornament of civil life—ſecondly, its defence and ſecurity againſt external invaſion, and injury—and, laſtly, the conſideration and conſequence it poſſeſſes among other nations. In every one of theſe reſpects, that character of piety and virtue, already deſcribed, will be found to have the moſt beneficial effects, nay, to be the only poſſible means of advancing each of theſe objects to its higheſt degree of perfection.

Conſider, firſt, its influence with reſpect to internal order and peace, and the various conveniences and enjoyments of civil life. For the better attainment of theſe ends, certain perſons have, in every political community, been inveſted with authority to command. Laws have been enacted, ſanctions annexed to them, and Magiſtrates empowered to put theſe ſanctions in execution. For the preſervation of men's moſt valuable poſſeſſions and rights, thoſe of an inferior ſort have been ſurrendered, and liberty has been ſubjected to ſome reſtraints, that it may, in fact, be enjoyed to greater advantage, than it could poſſibly be, in the uncontrouled ſtate of nature. Whatever be, in reality, the origin of moſt governments, whatever be the particular

form they have aſſumed, this is the only ſolid foundation in reaſon, on which they reſt, and to this principle—their tendency to ſecure the peace and happineſs of mankind—they muſt all have recourſe, in vindicating their reſpective claims to excellence. But, it is evident that, under no government, the ſimple inſtitution of civil authority can ſuffice for producing the deſired effect; but that, for this purpoſe, it is abſolutely neceſſary that civil rulers be diligent, and faithful in the diſcharge of their functions; and the people, in general, diſpoſed to yield a ready obedience to their lawful commands.—This faithful diſcharge of office, on the one hand, and, on the other, this dutiful obedience to Government, a prevailing regard for religion alone can effectually ſecure.

It will prevent rulers from perverting the power, committed to them, to the purpoſes of deſpotiſm and oppreſſion, or, indeed, from applying it to any other, than thoſe for which it was conferred. As nothing can be more contrary to the dictates both of natural equity, and of divine revelation, than to invade the rights of others, under whatever pretext, much much more to employ, to their detriment, what was inſti-

inſtituted for their benefit alone, it is impoſſible that thoſe, who are impreſſed with a becoming reverence for the *Lord of Lords*, who conſider themſelves as peculiarly reſponſible to him *by whom Kings reign, and Princes decree juſtice*, ſhould not *execute juſtice and judgment*—ſhould not abhor extortion and oppreſſion—ſhould not preſerve a ſtrict impartiality with regard to perſons and things—ſhould not employ their power and authority ſolely for the puniſhment *of evil doers, and the praiſe and encouragemement of them that do well.* On the contrary, they will ever keep in view the intereſts of a people committed to them, conſider this as their principal, their unvarying object, and exert every endeavour to promote it, in the higheſt degree.

Nay, a juſt comprehenſion of the precepts of pure and undefiled religion, and a correſpondent regard for them, will prevent men from aſſuming ſuch offices as they are not, in every reſpect, qualified to diſcharge; and engage them to ſtudy the acquirement of abilities neceſſary for ſuch as they deſire to enjoy. True religion admits, to the public adminiſtration, none, but ſuch as are capable to judge of public intereſt, and to purſue it with ſteadineſs; none, but ſuch as bring along with

with them, the honeſt heart, the cool head, the active temper. She deliberates with maturity, reaſons with calmneſs, reſolves with caution, and executes with vigour. Inſpired by her, no man looks on, with indifference, when the public cauſe demands his attention, loiters in indolence, or indulges in pleaſure, when a country's good calls for his application and activity; prefers private intereſt or paſſion to a whole nation's concerns; or flinches from duty becauſe danger is in the way. Religion no bribe can corrupt, no terror intimidate, no paſſion ſway. Animated by her every man intruſted with the public intereſt, conſiders every meaſure he adopts as affecting the welfare of thouſands, as extending its effects to remote poſterity, as conſtituting a part of that ſtrict account which he muſt give at the awful tribunal of the Judge of the world!

The warmeſt deſire of his ſoul is to render himſelf moſt extenſively uſeful. In proſecution of this glorious object, he calls forth all his activity and diligence, and, from its attainment, derives his moſt exalted ſatisfactions. What better wiſh, my brethren, could the trueſt patriot form for his country, than that the adminiſtration of its affairs were committed to perſons of ſuch a character?

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What better wiſh could he form, unleſs it were, that ſuch a ſpirit and temper were univerſally diffuſed among his fellow citizens, and engaged them to afford a ready obedience to thoſe who were ſo admirably qualified to command! This a prevailing regard for pure religion alſo effectuates!

As ſhe teaches that civil governours are God's vicegerents upon earth, and inſtruments, in his hands, for promoting the happineſs of mankind, ſhe alſo requires, towards them, that veneration and obedience which theſe characters ſo juſtly demand. A people, influenced by her, will readily ſubmit themſelves to the *ordinances of the powers that are ordained of God, and render, unto all, their dues; tribute, to whom tribute is due, cuſtom to whom cuſtom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.*

Hence, beſide the general order and tranquility it would enjoy, the nation, *whoſe God was the Lord*, would alſo be freed from thoſe occaſional factions and civil broils which ſo frequently diſtract political communities, and ſometimes tear to pieces the moſt powerful ſtates and empires. It is, indeed, true that, conſidering the imperfection of the human underſtanding, and the narrowneſs

rowneſs of its views, men may differ about public intereſt, even when both parties are ſincerely deſirous of promoting it. But, even in this caſe, *wars and fightings, contention, and every evil work*, would, here, never be the reſult;—for, baniſh pride, ambition, and ſelfiſhneſs, and the ſeeds of faction and party—commotion and tumult are deſtroyed. Every man would explain himſelf with moderation, and unfold, with ingenuity, the motives that induced him to prefer the ſcheme of public advantage he propoſed, and, as public advantage would be his only object, would eaſily relinquiſh that ſcheme, when the ſuperiority of any other ſhould be evinced to his unbiaſſed reaſon.

From this view of the bleſſed effects of religion on the reſpective duties of rulers and ſubjects, turn your eyes to thoſe it is calculated to produce among men, merely as fellow-citizens. As *the righteous Lord*, whom *ſuch a nation is ſuppoſed to ſerve, loveth righteouſneſs, and juſtice is the habitation of his throne*, they would maintain a religious regard for each other's rights, abſtaining from whatever can injure men's perſons, property, or reputation; *violence and ſtrife would not be ſeen in the city*; *deceit and guile would depart from their ſtreets*. Slander would not ſpread among them her envenomed

venomed breath. Every man would remain in the undiſturbed poſſeſſion of his privileges and lawful enjoyments, and never aim at any, beyond theſe. In the ſeveral relations of parents and children; of huſbands and wives; of maſters and ſervants; of high and low, of rich and poor, they would obſerve all that exact fulfilment of obligation, all that reciprocation of good offices which render ſociety truly a refuge from the infirmities and exigencies of nature, and make man to man *as an hiding place from the wind, as a covert from the tempeſt; as rivers of water in a dry place, and the ſhadow of a great rock, in a weary land.** Suſpicion and jealouſy muſt abandon their happy ſociety; and mutual truſt and confidence be firmly eſtabliſhed.

Further, as the object of their worſhip, is the *father of mercies, and the God of all conſolation*, ſuch a people would be no leſs remarkable *for loving mercy*, than *for doing juſtly*. They would particularly ſerve him by imitating (if I may be allowed the expreſſion) his favourite and moſt glorious attribute—by drying the tears of ſorrow—by ſatisfying the cravings of hunger—by ſoothing the agonies of affliction. Among them, the indigent and the wretched would learn to know the

* Iſa. xxxii. 2.

the unequal meaſure of their lot, ſtill more by the relief they received, than by the preſſure of their condition. Among them, the very circumſtances, which prove the imbecility of our nature, would alſo exhibit the ſtrength and beauty of its finer principles. Among them, men would truly become brethren, and, recogniſing their heavenly father, cultivate the diſpoſitions which belong to his family. Particular proſperity would produce univerſal ſatisfaction, and private diſtreſs be extinguiſhed amidſt public ſympathy. Charity would be recalled from thoſe heavens, to which ſhe had fled, and reaſſume her golden reign upon earth. The moſt lively pictures of prophecy would be realized. *The heavy burdens would be undone; Every yoke be broken—bread be dealt to the hungry—the poor brought in—the naked covered—nothing would hurt or deſtroy in the nation whoſe God was the Lord.*

But, great as theſe advantages of concord, peace, and mutual affection, are, will the influence of religion be ſolely confined to theſe? From her, is no benefit to be expected in thoſe purſuits which enrich and adorn ſociety? Yes, my brethren, her influence will be conſpicuous even in thoſe departments where, perhaps, it may be leſs obvious,

obvious. Trade, art, and ſcience would flouriſh under her reign.

To the advancement of the firſt of theſe ſhe is peculiarly conducive, in as much as ſhe has a peculiar tendency to produce and preſerve frugality, induſtry and honeſty, its three moſt neceſſary virtues.

She teaches that a becoming moderation and temperance are to be obſerved in the uſe of thoſe conveniencies and comforts which providence beſtows, and prevents voluptuouſneſs and effeminacy from ſubduing the mind, pomp and magnificence from poſſeſſing overpowering ſplendors, and luxury from erecting her pernicious throne.— In men's houſes, furniture, equipage, and table, ſhe preſcribes that mediocrity, which, alone, both admits the enjoyment, and excludes the abuſe, of any good. Under her influence, then, the merchant is endowed with that frugal turn which, alone, can render his buſineſs profitable by multiplying his ſtock, preventing him from ſquandering, in diſſipation, what his induſtry has earned, and enabling him to apply his gains to the extenſion of his trade.

Religion requires us to improve, to the utmoſt, thoſe talents committed, to us, by providence, *to be diligent in buſineſs*, and *to owe no man any thing, but love.* Awaked by her, the active ſpirit of induſtry pervades the whole ſocial body. Poverty and want are baniſhed from the habitations of men, and ſmiling plenty, and honeſt independence occupy their place. What ample ſources are, hence, provided for every uſeful branch of commerce! what acquiſitions are made for agriculture and manufactures! Were this ſpirit univerſally diffuſed, how many, who now conſume their days in priſons, or are in danger of having them cut ſhort by an untimely death, would be happily employed both for themſelves, and the public!— Intemperance, diſſipation, and indolence being baniſhed, not only ſuperior numbers would be employed in labour, but even theſe would be endowed with ſuperior activity.

Religion inculcates the ſtricteſt juſtice and fairneſs in our dealings, that *a falſe balance is an abomination to the Lord, and that his bleſſing alone maketh rich without ſorrow.* By deſtroying fraud and circumvention ſhe erects one of the principal pillars of commerce; for this cannot ſubſiſt without

without ſome degree of mutual confidence, and is never found to flouriſh but where it is firmly eſtabliſhed. Punctuality in the fulfilment of engagements, and fidelity in the diſcharge of truſt, are virtues ſo peculiarly mercantile, that even the ſcience of gain preſcribes an inviolable regard for them, as the moſt effectual means of commercial ſucceſs, whether with reſpect to individuals, or to nations. A perſon, once cheated, purchaſes no more from the deceiver, and cautiouſly avoids every occaſion of putting his property in his power. The foreigner, defrauded and unjuſtly treated, returns no more to the inſidious port, and, enflamed with reſentment, ſpreads, thro' diſtant countries, the fraudulent character of the people whoſe deceit he hath ſo ſeverely experienced.

From this account of profit and of loſs, caſt your eyes on the nobler purſuits of ſcience, and of art, and once more confeſs the generous power of religion! Does not the cultivation of theſe depend on the exerciſe of the finer, and more elevated faculties of the ſoul? and can this exerciſe be carried on while the mind is enſlaved to paſſion, chained down to the uncontrouled indulgence of appetite, or enervated by luxury?

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What, but the power of religion, can prevent theſe diſmal effects? This preſerves the native vigour of the mind, keeps it open to every generous and noble feeling, and enables it to expatiate, with eaſe, in the pure regions of ſpirit, and to purſue truth, through its moſt intricate receſſes, or to range the fields of imagination, to exert, with ſucceſs, its imitative powers, and to produce beauty and elegance in their various forms.

Thus, the happy influence of religion ſtands confeſſed with reſpect to the arts of peace, which are ſo congenial to her gentle nature: but may, perhaps, with ſome appearance of reaſon, be denied with regard to war, and the bloody ſcience of deſtruction. Yet, unleſs ſhe can alſo provide for this, in ſome tolerable manner, her tendency to produce national felicity will be partial and defective; for, however happy a people may be in their internal government, and in the poſſeſſion of all thoſe advantages which ſweeten, and adorn, civil ſociety, they will hold them by a very precarious tenure, unleſs they are able to defend them againſt invaſion, and the inſolent ambition of conqueſt.

But, the reſolution and power of defence will never be wanting to the *nation whoſe God is the Lord;*

Lord. He will enable them, tho' deteſting war, to face it, when unavoidable, with undaunted courage, to deſpiſe danger, and to perſevere, in the conteſt, with victorious firmneſs. I ſpeak not, at preſent, of extraordinary interpoſitions of providence in behalf of a religious, and virtuous people, but of the natural effects of that character itſelf. This will, in the firſt place, free them from many contentions and wars in which nations are ſo frequently involved by their own injuſtice, or imprudence. For, all thoſe virtues, which the individuals of their community exerciſe towards each other, the community itſelf will practiſe, towards other nations and ſtates; becauſe rational piety requires, in both caſes, a ſimilar conduct.

With regard to thoſe, with whom they are united by the ſacred ties of treaty and alliance, they will ſtudy to perform their engagements with unvarying punctuality. They will conſider thoſe obligations into which ſtates and princes but too frequently enter, merely from convenience, and break on the ſame ground, as ſealed with the ſacred ſanction of that Almighty Being they adore, and afford them all that religious regard, which ſuch a circumſtance juſtly demands. Impreſſed with the awful reverence of an oath they will care-

carefully ſhun that wicked ſophiſtry which tortures, into an unnatural conformity, the moſt inconſiſtent and contradictory caſes. Whatever, therefore, can be fairly implied, they will view as equally obligatory, as what is poſitively expreſſed. What is ambiguous and equivocal they will interpret with candour, and, avoiding duplicity and chicane, will endeavour rather to prevent demands, by generoſity, than to evade them by cunning. Good faith, not policy, juſtice not rapine, will be the rule of their conduct. They will exhibit the pleaſing, yet uncommon, ſpectacle of politics unſupported by craft, and a nation's concerns directed on the plain and ſure ground of integrity.

Towards thoſe nations with which they are not united by any other ties, but thoſe of a common nature, they will take the ſimple dictates of equity for the rule of their proceedings. Whatever theſe preſcribe as incumbent upon individuals they will conſider as equally incumbent upon political communities; nor will their unſophiſticated reaſon allow them to diſcover that aſſociations of men can change the nature of things. *To do unto others as we would they ſhould do unto us*, will, among them, be a precept equal-

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ly valid in public, as in private caſes. Never, therefore, will they ſeek for opportunities of ſeizing by violence, or of appropriating by fraud, the poſſeſſions of their neighbours. Advantages, which cannot be procured in conſiſtence with honour and juſtice, they will conſider as deſpicable, and intrinſically pernicious. They will avoid that accurſed ambition, which ſo frequently converts into the ſcourges, thoſe who were appointed to be the protectors, of mankind, and into the victims of a blinded fury, thoſe who were pointed out as the objects of a fatherly care.

Is it not eaſy to ſee what contentions and external calamities ſuch a conduct will prevent? It may be obſerved, with reſpect to ſtates, what we daily behold in the caſes of private perſons, that thoſe who *love peace and purſue it*, are generally left in the undiſturbed poſſeſſion of their rights, becauſe they are ſecured by the good will of mankind; whereas the turbulent and contentious, by drawing, upon themſelves, univerſal reſentment, are obliged to paſs their days in continual alarm and hoſtility.

It muſt, however, be confeſſed that this is but a general rule, from which there are many exceptions,

ceptions, both in public, and in private caſes, in which the juſt and peaceable are forced to ſtand on the defenſive againſt the lawleſs and the violent. But, in theſe, when the ways of force are unavoidable, the *nation, whoſe God is the Lord*, will be poſſeſſed of the moſt ample reſources for defending or proſecuting their juſt rights. Unnervated by luxury and intemperance, unchained by ſelf-intereſt, and poſſeſſed of a noble independence and freedom of ſoul, every individual among them will be able to lift up his eyes, with eaſe, to ſo grand an object as public good. The ſpirit of patriotiſm, always kindled in his breaſt, will, when his country is expoſed to danger, burn with a flame which oppoſition and peril will only ſerve to feed! Viewing the nation's proſperity as a principal ſource of his happineſs, and its defence as his indiſpenſable duty, rather than fail in the one, or behold the loſs of the other, he will ſacrifice thoſe conſiderations which men hold moſt precious, and moſt dear. Fortune will be offered up to his country's ſupport, and even life, to his country's ſafety.

Nor will theſe efforts be unavailing. All thoſe treaſures, which the honeſt induſtry of ſuch a people has enabled them to acquire, and their fruga-

frugality, to preſerve, will be poured into the coffers of the ſtate, and money, the nerves of war, be ready for every enterprize. Adminiſtered by men of ſkill and integrity, it will run no riſk of being embezzled, employed in unprofitable meaſures, or ſquandered, even in ſuch as are proper, with an unneceſſary profuſion: but, directed ſolely to the purpoſes for which it was beſtowed, will alſo be applied, to theſe, in the moſt effectual manner.

In the field, their operations will be equally active, well directed, and effectual. Temperance will furniſh them with bodies ſtrengthened to ſupport every degree of military fatigue. A love of order, and obedience to legal government, will make them eaſily obſerve the moſt regular diſcipline. A due ſenſe of the infinite value of civil and religious freedom, of all the bleſſings of good government, together with confidence in the protection of the Almighty, whom they ſerve, and the hopes of immortal glory, will reconcile them to labour and hardſhip, make them deſpiſe danger and death, and animate them with a courage which the moſt formidable enemy will not daunt. Religion, my brethren, inſpires with a valour which is not raſh and inconſiderate, but manly,

firm, and collected. Of all the armies in the world, the laſt a ſkilful general would chuſe to encounter would, ſurely, be one compoſed of men inured, from their infancy, to temperance and honeſt labour, accuſtomed to obedience and diſcipline, conſidering each other as brethren, and members, not only of an earthly, but alſo of a heavenly, community, aſſured *of the bleſſing of the Lord of hoſts*, and determined, under this, to ſacrifice their lives to their country's defence! Juſt ſuch is the army which *the nation whoſe God is the Lord*, will poſſeſs.

Will not that diſcipline, which flows from a love of order and virtuous obedience, be more exact and regular than that which is ſolely dictated by the terror of puniſhment, and catches at every opportunity of evaſion? Will not that activity, which proceeds from an ardour to ſecure the nobleſt prerogatives of our nature, be ſuperior to that which is the effect of a love of rapine? Will not that courage, which is founded on a conſciouſneſs of the juſtice of its cauſe, and a confidence in the divine protection, be more firm and determined, than that which is produced by the deſire of attracting the favour of a tyrant? Yes, my brethren, actuated by theſe principles, animated by theſe motives, and favoured by the Lord of hoſts,

hoſts, in the day of battle, an army will lead victory in its ranks, and drive its foes before it! Nor will that intemperate deſire of aggrandiſement, and that falſe ſecurity, which victory ſo commonly produces, ever expoſe ſuch a people to loſe, by their imprudence, what their valour has obtained. For, as the maintenance of their rights is the only ſpring of their warlike operations, ſo, it will ever be the termination of them. They will ſhew themſelves as ready to lay down their arms as they are able to hold them. Even in the midſt of victory, they will hearken to accommodation, and, by war, only aim at peace.

Great, however, as theſe reſources are, they will not remain unſupported. The punctuality of ſuch a nation, in fulfilling its engagements to its allies, and its juſtice and generoſity towards all with whom it is, in any way, connected, will furniſh it with the juſteſt claim to their ſupport and aſſiſtance in return: nor will it fail to obtain it. The equitable uſe of its power, allowing no room for jealouſy, its allies will alſo be its friends, conſider their own intereſt as particularly concerned in its ſafety and welfare, and be, therefore, peculiarly active in defending it.

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This will be the caſe, even tho' no immediate views of intereſt ſhould occur. For, altho' it ſeems a maxim in politics, that no meaſure is to be purſued, no ſtep taken, without a fair proſpect of profit, in return, whatever juſtice and humanity may dictate; yet, the paſſions and inclinations of mankind are ever running counter to this maxim, and hiſtory ſhews, by numberleſs inſtances, that prejudice, averſion, or favour are, in the caſes of nations, as well as of individuals, as frequently the ſprings of action, as the calm dictates of prudence and of intereſt. The nation, therefore, whoſe equity and good faith ſhall have ſecured general favour, may, when unjuſtly invaded, expect general cooperation and aſſiſtance.

The laſt conſtituent point of national felicity was the honour and glory, the conſideration and reſpect, which a ſtate poſſeſſes among others. We are endowed, by our Creator, with a keen ſenſe of honour and diſgrace, which makes the regards of our fellow men matter of great concern to our happineſs. This principle ſeems to acquire additional ſtrength from political aſſociation. The dignity of the nation, to which they belong, its ſplendour and renown affect men with very lively emotions of ſatisfaction, and are conſidered as dr-

circumſtances ſo eſſential to their welfare, that, for their advancement, they ſcruple not to expoſe themſelves to the moſt imminent dangers, to incur the ſevereſt hardſhips, and even to ſacrifice the more ſolid intereſts of the community. Theſe points are, indeed, very commonly miſunderſtood, and, from good principles, ill applied, often hurry men into the moſt enormous actions. Nevertheleſs, when conſidered in their juſt light, they ſtill remain an important branch of national felicity, for the completion of which they muſt, of conſequence, be ſecured and advanced.

Religion has, in this reſpect, an influence ſo peculiarly happy, that ſhe leads men both to entertain the juſteſt notions of national glory, and to purſue the moſt effectual means of attaining it. She teaches to aim at that opulence which is the fruit of honeſt induſtry, not at that which is purchaſed by circumvention and fraud; at that power, which is the reſult of patriotiſm, unanimity, and a ſpirit of lawful enterprize, not at that which is obtained by violent invaſion, or treacherous ſurpriſe; at that luſtre which burſts, with a ſolar blaze, from valorous deeds in defending our deareſt rights, in affording a refuge to the diſtreſſed, in protecting innocence, and in oppoſing oppreſſors,

preſſors, and tyrants, not at that which flaſhes, with a baleful effulgence, from the daring achievments of ambition, and the deſolating fury of conqueſt. Eager to diffuſe, among others, that happineſs they themſelves enjoy, a nation influenced by her will ſeek to make their glory reſound in the ſongs of contentment and peace, rather than in the din of arms, and the ſhrieks of diſtreſs! Their annals will hand down, to poſterity, none of thoſe opprobrious deeds—the offspring of faction, oppreſſion, and cruelty—which have, at times, diſgraced the hiſtory of all nations; but will exhibit one uniform picture of juſtice, moderation, and magnanimity! And muſt not this inſure to them the conſideration and reſpect of every ſurrounding people, and ſpread their fame as far as human intercourſe extends! Even thoſe, that envy their greatneſs, will admire their virtues, and the rivals of their power be forced to acknowledge their title to enjoy it, by finding it impoſſible to equal, but by imitating, them! Their alliance will be courted as of all the moſt honourable and advantageous. Their name, ſuggeſting every magnanimous idea, will be pronounced with a ſentiment of admiration and reſpect. They will acquire, among nations, that authority which a great and good man commonly poſſeſſes among his fel-

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low citizens. Their ſentiments and manners will be fixed upon as ſtandards of conduct, and attract univerſal imitation.

Thus, my brethren, in every light, in which national felicity can be viewed, the happy effects of pure religion are conſpicuous. Indeed, an obedience to her precepts is the only infallible means of advancing it to its higheſt pitch, and of preſerving it unimpaired. On the other hand, a ſimilar deduction would no leſs clearly evince that the prevalence of irreligion and vice cannot fail to effectuate a nation's ruin. But ſuch deduction neither our time allows us to exhibit, nor indeed, it is neceſſary. For, if a regard for religion and virtue is the moſt effectual means of a nation's happineſs— if its *making the Lord its God* is a neceſſary condition of its *being bleſſed*— the concluſion is unavoidable, that the contrary temper and conduct muſt produce the contrary effect. Nor are theſe concluſions ſolely founded on ſpeculation, and what the nature of the thing might lead us to expect. They are alſo confirmed by univerſal experience. The hiſtory of mankind, from the earlieſt political communities, down to the preſent times, is uniform in declaring that the proſperity of ſtates and empires is a neceſſary

ceſſary conſequence of their virtue, and that profligacy and vice are the infallible cauſes of their decay, and deſtruction.

Conſider thoſe nations whoſe riſe and progreſs, decline and fall, have been clearly marked out to us, which, from ſmall beginnings, have riſen to the moſt illuſtrious grandeur and power, and, thence, ſunk into contempt and ruin—conſider theſe, and ſay what national characters plainly diſtinguiſhed them at theſe different periods.—Did not frugality, induſtry, juſtice, a noble contempt of gain and pleaſure, an ardent love of public good, a veneration for religion—in a word, a ſacred regard for every branch of rectitude, as far as their knowledge extended, accompany them in their flouriſhing condition—and did not the contrary vices precede, and at laſt accompliſh, their ruin?

Should it be alledged that thoſe nations of antiquity, to which I allude, being deſtitute of the knowledge of the true God, and, of conſequence, uninfluenced by veneration for him, cannot ſerve as examples of my poſition; let it be conſidered that, altho' they *had not the law, they were yet a law unto themſelves, and, while they did by nature the things contained in the law,* alſo obtained a pro-

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portionable ſhare of that temporal felicity which is annexed to the obſervance of it.

Indeed, the juſtice of God himſelf, and the honour of his government, are, in ſome meaſure, concerned in evincing the truth I have endeavoured to eſtabliſh. With reſpect to individuals, the preſent ſcene is merely a ſtate of probation and diſcipline, in which apparent irregularities muſt neceſſarily prevail, as its unavoidable attendants.—The next is deſigned for the rectification of theſe, for the complete manifeſtation of the divine perfections, and the final retribution of moral agents.—With regard to nations, the caſe is very different. The preſent ſtate of things comprehends their origin, and their end. In the next life, all national diſtinctions will be aboliſhed; mankind will no longer be claſſed in political communities; and the only ſocieties, that will remain, will be thoſe of heaven, and of hell. In as far, then, as the government of God is concerned in the conduct of nations (and that it is, in a very conſiderable degree, is abundantly certain,) the divine juſtice is, in ſome meaſure, pledged for their preſent reward, or puniſhment: and this may be conſidered as the final cauſe of that unvarying connection which

is obſervable, in the fates of nations, between virtue and proſperity, vice and ruin. Hence alſo it ſufficiently appears how vain it is to endeavour to eſtabliſh national proſperity on any foundation, of which religion forms not an eſſential part.—Whenever this is done, as it has, in fact, been attempted, we may ſafely affirm that the event will prove it to be as abſurd, and illuſory, as it is impious; that confuſion, every ſpecies of profligacy, miſery, and final ruin will be the fate of the people which adopts, and adheres to, ſuch pernicious principles.

But, let it be particularly conſidered, that, if this fact is certain with reſpect to ſtates and kingdoms in general, it is peculiarly ſo, with reſpect to a free people.

In a nation, where the whole community is abſolutely dependent on the arbitrary will of one Sovereign Lord, the ſummary meaſures of deſpotiſm, and the rigorous execution of its decrees, may be ſufficient to preſerve a tolerable degree of tranquility and order, even after virtuous principles have loſt much of their influence.—But, among a free people, where laws are liberal and mild, the adminiſtration of them cautious

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and ſlow, and the government widely ſhared; whenever corruption begins to manifeſt its baneful effects in a general indifference to the public good, and a general purſuit of private intereſt or pleaſure, the whole political fabric muſt ſoon crumble into ruin, and, in order to preſerve any ſhadow of its exiſtence, recourſe muſt be had to arbitrary ſway, the only form of which it is, any longer, ſuſceptible.

After having thus illuſtrated the ordinary means and conditions of the diſtribution of the divine bleſſings upon nations, I might mention many extraordinary ways in which the providence of God may interpoſe in behalf of a virtuous people, and of which hiſtory is not deſtitute of examples. But, what remaining time we may yet poſſeſs, only allows me haſtily to cull that practical improvement, which reſults from the whole of the ſubject I have treated.

I am very ſenſible, my brethren, that I have greatly treſpaſſed on your patience, by having ſo far exceeded my ordinary limits. But, I would fain flatter myſelf, that the extenſive nature of the ſubject, and my eager deſire of treating it in ſuch a manner as might in ſome meaſure con-

contribute to your edification, will plead my excuſe, and, ſince you have hitherto favoured me with an attentive ear, that you will yet indulge me with a few moments, while I proceed to my concluſion.

III. If it be inconteſtible, *that that nation, whoſe God is the Lord, can alone be bleſt*, that religion and virtue are the only infallible means of advancing national proſperity; and irreligion and vice the certain cauſes of its deſtruction; if we are, at the ſame time, actuated by any deſire of the public welfare, in which our own is moſt eſſentially involved; in a word, if we have any regard for our deareſt and moſt valuable temporal concerns; all theſe conſiderations loudly call upon us to revolve our own conduct with the moſt ſerious attention, and to examine what foundation we have for hope, or for fear. This examination cannot fail to ſhew us that the latter of theſe affections ought to claim the juſteſt place in our breaſts. It cannot fail to convince us that pure and undefiled religion is far from poſſeſſing, among us, its due influence, nay, that corruption and profligacy have too generally ſpread their contagious effects. This we ourſelves openly acknowledge by aſſembling on this occaſion,

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and have, I hope, ſincerely confeſſed before the throne of grace.

Nor let theſe reflections be viewed in the light of common-place complaints, which have been poured from the pulpit in the days of our fore-fathers, as well as in ours, and appearing equally founded in both, give, on this account, no juſt ground for us to apprehend a worſe fate, as a nation, than they experienced.

Such concluſion, even altho' the ſuppoſition, on which it is founded, were true, would be egregiouſly falſe, and illuſive. For, if the vices of our anceſtors were as great as thoſe of their poſterity, this circumſtance, ſo far from lulling us into a fatal ſecurity, ought the more to awaken our apprehenſions; for, in this caſe, the evil would be of longer continuance, have become more inveterate, and approached nearer to the completion of its fatal conſequences.

Be this as it may; it is ſtill true that the complaints of the profligacy of the times are, with reference to public good, perhaps now better founded than ever, and therefore, in this view, merit a particular attention. I readily allow that depravity has

has been too prevalent in every age of the world, and that every ſtate of civil ſociety, like every period of human life, has its peculiar vices; yet, thoſe which characteriſe the preſent age are ſurely, in a peculiar manner, pernicious to national proſperity. Luxury, effeminacy, and voluptuouſneſs; a ſordid, inſatiable thirſt of gain, as the only means of procuring ſuch indulgences; a narrow ſelfiſhneſs and indifference to the public welfare; a real or affected infidelity; an open contempt of things ſacred, or a forced obſervance of them—Theſe are the vices which are moſt prevalent among us, and theſe are the vices which have the ſtrongeſt tendency to ſubvert the welfare of a people.

This depravity, on our part, is greatly aggravated by reflecting on the peculiar bleſſings with which we are favoured. We are bleſſed with the ſweets of civil and religious liberty, notwithſtanding the exaggerated complaints which have been ſo often made on this ſubject. We enjoy the ineſtimable privilege of deriving the whole counſel of God from the pure ſource of his own oracles, and of ſerving him according to the dictates of our conſciences. We are maintained in the undiſturbed poſſeſſion of thoſe rights and privileges

vileges which we count moſt dear, as men, as citizens, or as chriſtians. Even the public diſtreſſes, which we lament, if compared with the preſent ſtate of thoſe nations of Europe, which are moſt contiguous to us, ought rather to excite and confirm our gratitude to the gracious diſpoſer of human affairs, than to lead us to murmuring and diſcontent. War and ſcarcity are the two evils that oppreſs us. Can we ſay, that by our national purity of manners, we have deſerved neither? or can we refuſe to acknowledge that our ſituation in both reſpects is not mild and lenient, when compared with that of our enemies, or thoſe ſubjected to their power, who are groaning under the complicated calamities of conqueſt, extortion, pillage, deſolation, and every ſpecies of degradation that can fall to the lot of man. *The judgments of God are in the earth;* he is exerciſing his juſtice on political communities. Some nations he is afflicting with the moſt dreadful calamities. Hardly any country of Europe is exempted from diſtreſs and affliction. We ourſelves lament over our ſituation. We eagerly wiſh to ſee it exchanged for a better. We are inceſſantly figuring, to ourſelves, the moſt effectual means of attaining this deſirable purpoſe. But, in the midſt of our

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ſchemes, do we look up to God, with the eye of faith, with the ſoul of piety, with the heart of repentance? Do we derive, from a heavenly ſource, all our hopes of more ſerene and proſperous days? Have public calamities produced national reformation? We talk of every kind of *reform*, but the only radical and effectual one—a *reform* of heart and conduct. It is aſtoniſhing that, in this *regenerating* and *reforming* age, the *reformation* of manners, and the *regeneration* of the ſoul, ſhould be entirely forgotten. If every man would ſeriouſly think of reforming himſelf, a general reformation of manners would be the neceſſary conſequence, and I will be bold to ſay, that this would bring, along with it, every other *reform* which we may need. If political abuſes exiſt, they exiſt only by our own corruption; the fountain itſelf muſt be purified before it can ſend forth pure and ſalutary ſtreams. The influence of religion and virtue would ſpeedily reſtore complete health and vigour to the whole political body. Without them, every other medicine may palliate, but can never radically cure; may delay, but never can prevent, the fatal iſſue of every exiſting diſtemper.

Let us, then, reflect before reflection be fruitleſs. Let us impreſs, on our minds, a deep ſenſe of

of the importance of religion to our happineſs, as a people, as well as individuls. Let us conſider ourſelves as ſuch conſtituent members of the *body politic*, that our moral condition muſt affect it in a very ſenſible manner, and be, thence, reflected on ourſelves. Let us ſeriouſly examine our hearts, diſcover their defects and vices, confeſs them, with the deepeſt contrition, before the throne of grace, implore the pardon of them for the ſake of our bleſſed Redeemer, form the moſt vigorous reſolutions of reformation, and ſupplicate the divine aid to carry them into effectual execution. May God accept our penitence and our prayers, aſſiſt our virtuous purpoſes, continue and augment our bleſſings, and enable us to ſay, with grateful rapture, and from happy experience, *bleſſed is that nation, whoſe God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath choſen for his own inheritance.*

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